TL 2075

EAST TIMOR

Background to the human rights situation during 1994

This report aims to outline developments concerning the East Timor question during the period since the last United Nations Commission on Human Rights meeting in February 1994 so as to provide a context within which the information presented in reports from human rights organisations and in first-person accounts can be better understood.

Expanding Access

The commission in 1994 called upon Indonesia to continue the policy of expanding access to human rights and humanitarian organisations as well as international media. Let us look at the extent to which this access was conceded and the ensuing events.

Media access

April protests

On April 14, during a visit by 25 foreign journalists invited by the Indonesian Government, a group of 5 young Timorese staged a brief protest in front of the visitors' hotel in Dili, holding up a banner and calling for the release of Xanana Gusmao; this in spite of the security forces maintaining what the BBC correspondent described as "a tight grip on the city". A number of young people were later detained and in June three of them received 20-month prison sentences. The official Antara news agency later reported that Indonesian military authorities in East Timor had angrily criticised the journalists saying that some had treated their visit as an "investigation" trip and had strayed from the official agenda.

APEC in Indonesia, unrest in Dili

At the time of the APEC summit in Bogor, near Jakarta in November a considerable number of journalists were allowed to go to East Timor. Minister of Information Harkomo stated "There is no ban on foreign journalists" as long as they abide by the rules of the game, such as being in possession of the proper permit" (1) . Thus some 30 members of the international press were present in Dili to witness, at first hand, the repression of young Timorese demonstrating to mark the anniversary of the Santa Cruz massacre on Nov 12 and the events on succeeding days when hundreds of youths were involved in violent clashes with police and military and again on 28 when an apparently staged pro-integration demonstration led to more violence. There were widespread arrests and Amnesty International compiled a list of 125 Timorese detained in Dili and the vicinity between Nov. 12 to 14. This gave rise to considerable editorial comment:

Human rights - centre stage

International opinion, focussed on the run-up to the trade talks at the APEC summit, and on the hunger strike by 29 Timorese students in the US Embassy in Jakarta, was deeply perturbed at the developments in Dili. Political and human rights concerns, often thrust aside by the region's governments as their young economies boom, were brought on to centre stage: President Clinton raised the issue of human rights and East Timor "in firm and forceful terms" in his talks with President Suharto during the summit (2); former US president George Bush, and a longtime supporter of Suharto's government, expressed concern about the lack of progress on human rights in territory (3). On Nov. 17 the European Parliament passed a resolution referring to "the violent repression by the Indonesian army of occupation against Timorese demonstrators who, in Dili, were marking the anniversary of the Santa Cruz massacre and fighting for self-determination and for human rights".
Along with solidarity demonstrations in the US, UK and Australia, young East Timorese staged a protest at the Indonesian embassy in Spain and there was a demonstration by Korean human rights at the Indonesian embassy in Seoul, South Korea. Ramos-Horta of the CNRM as well as NGOs in the UK and Portugal appealed for a permanent UN presence in the territory.

Press expulsions

Meanwhile there was an immediate tightening of restrictions on journalists in East Timor:
- Five journalists were expelled, including representatives of Reuter and Associated Press AP 21 Nov.
- Reporters were required to obtain written permits limited to two days. (4)
- On Nov. 12 two US journalists, Nairn and Goodman survivors of the Santa Cruz massacre and allegedly removed from a government black-list were picked up as they were entering the territory from West Timor and held for 20 hours before being sent back to Jakarta in spite of the fact that they claim they had been issued with the appropriate journalist visas. (5)
- The Jakarta Government accused journalists of inciting the demonstrators. (6)
- Two more journalists were expelled the following week (7)

"People on the outside are listening"

The fact that so many Timorese participated in these protests attests considerable courage and desperation on their part knowing what had occurred in Dili three years before in Nov 1991 and the hard-line stance taken by military chief Major Gen. Adang Ruchtiana who had on 14 Oct. rejected an earlier offer of a cease-fire by Resistance leader Konis Santana and spoken of the sending of "a battalion of special combat troops" to East Timor.(8). The demonstrators may also have been encouraged by the fact that within East Timor, there is now considerable awareness, gleaned through radio and clandestine channels, of the extent of international support. Bishop Belo, speaking before the November events, remarked on this change: "After the years of silence, we still can't quite believe it. The young are very aware of it. When foreign delegations come, young people take incredible risks; but now they know people on the outside are listening ..." (9)

Aftermath of the November protests

Arising from these events, 125 Timorese were detained - Amnesty International Update, Nov 24. Human rights organisations expressed concern that, based on the pattern of events documented in the territory in previous such situations, those involved in the demonstrations in Dili, as well as the 40 Timorese students picked up before they could get join their companions at the US Embassy in Jakarta, would be harshly dealt with as soon as the international media had left. Indeed on 8 Dec. the BBC reported that dozens of people arrested in Dili during the November disturbances had been subjected to severe ill-treatment and torture.

Newspaper targeted

On Dec. 7 pro-integration youths smashed up the office of Dili's sole newspaper and it was reported that the same group later beat up one of its reporters (10). Earlier in the same week, Col Kiki Syahnakri, an ABRI commander based in East Timor, threatened that if East Timorese participated in any more demonstrations "I will not hesitate to clean them out ['sikat'in Bahasa Indonesia]". (11)

The recurring "image problem"

The overall pattern may be seen as one of an attempt by Indonesia to permit control relaxation of restrictions on access to East Timor by international media and then when these lead to evidence of human rights violations being revealed, embarrassing to the Jakarta Government and indeed supporting the allegations made by human rights groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch , Asia, who are being denied entry to East Timor, the reaction tends to one of repression and restriction of access. It is reported that the Jakarta Government paid more than half a million dollars to a US public relations firm to draw up a strategy and prepare press-kits to get around its "image problem" in dealing with the press attention expected during the Jakarta summit.

According to a leaked copy of the firm's report, it was anticipated that opening access to the media for the summit would probably lead to undesirable revelations and publicity but it was hoped that this could be successfully counter-balanced by vigourous promotion of more favourable news stories. (12)

Access for human rights organisations

Accused of making contacts abroad

In May Jose Neves, a theological student and said to be a leading figure in the pro-independence East Timorese underground, was arrested in an East Java post office, as he attempted to post information on human rights gathered during a recent trip to the territory, along with a letter from resistance leader Konis Santana to the international conference on East Timor in Manila. When his trial began in October he was accused of making contacts abroad to support rebellious acts against Indonesia and among the examples cited by his prosecution were letters to UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and the Japanese Prime Minister Hosokawa.(13) His trial was then adjourned until after the APEC conference. When it was resumed in December no foreign journalists were present.

"Allow international monitoring" - Indonesian parliamentarians

In June the Jakarta Post reported that an Indonesian inter-parliamentary cooperation committee in a report, which was read by native Timorese legislator Salvador Ximenes Soares, had called on the government to respect human rights in East Timor and to allow international monitoring groups into the territory including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, Asia. (14)

Access for foreign delegations - contradictory impressions from MPs visits

Japanese visitors restricted

An all-party delegation of Japanese MPs on visiting East Timor in August complained that, although they had been promised "absolute freedom", they were not allowed to visit places outside the capital or speak to people whose names they had submitted 6 months in advance. They heard that there had been a large number of detentions before their visit. Mr Tomiko Okazaki said "We think the military should be removed from East Timor as soon as possible" . At the APEC conference in November the Japanese PM, in a departure from previous policy of reticence in pressing fellow Asian countries on human rights issues, was reported to have told President Suharto that Indonesia's human rights record would be taken into account in Tokyo's next aid package. (15)

British impressed

A three-day visit by 6 British MPs in September praised Indonesia for its human rights record in East Timor. The leader of the visiting Anglo-Indonesian Parliamentary Group, Conservative MP Patrick Nicholls, said he was very impressed by the Indonesian Government's efforts to prevent a recurrence of the 1991 massacre in Dili and that human rights issues had improved considerably. Bishop Belo commented "That's false. What did Nicholls see? They had the military watching them all the time." No members of the main British opposition parties were included in the group and indeed Nicholl's comments were put in question by the Labour Shadow Foreign Secretary, Ann Clywd. (16)

Church visit cancelled

The long-expected visit by a delegation from the World Council of Churches at the invitation of the Indonesian Christian Churches and scheduled for the latter part of November, did not take place because the Jakarta Government refused to issue the promised entry visas.

Openness in other forums

Indonesian press: more openness on Timor and ... closure

Within Indonesia itself, a developing openness in press reporting on East Timor and other issues early in the year was followed by a clamp-down. On 31 March the weekly "Editor" carried a detailed account of research by Indonesian academic, and former winner of the President Suharto environmentalist of the year award, George Aditjondro into the environmental effects of the Indonesian presence in East Timor. Dr Aditjondro's studies had confirmed the worst case estimates that 10% of the population of East Timor (60,000) were killed or died from war related deprivations in the first two months after the invasion by Indonesian troops in October 1974. He also said he had the names of 271 people killed and 200 missing after the Santa Cruz massacre in November 1991 (the Indonesian Government inquiry claimed that 50 were killed and 57 went missing). The article suggested this data could provide input to the up-coming round of UN-sponsored Indonesian-Portuguese negotiations in May.

This was the first time such comments had been published in Indonesia attributed to a prominent Indonesian figure rather than anti-Indonesian foreigners. In the following months there was increasing pressure on Editor which culminated in its closure in June along with June along with Tempo (for which Aditjondro was a regular columnist) and Detik all of whom had been outspoken on Timor and internal corruption issues. Dr Aditjondro also suffered, his house was stoned by hooligans in March the day after a press conference at which he had spoken of his findings, and later in the year, in the run-up to the APEC summit, he was arrested and interrogated for 2 periods totalling 15 hours before being released. He was again summoned for interrogation later on 28 Dec. a week after having testified for the defence in the trial of Jose Neves (see above). (17) Two academic colleagues who defended the publication of his work were threatened with dismissal.

No Asian NGO conferences, please

When it came to NGOs in other Asian countries organising conferences on the Timor question, the reaction from the Jakarta Government was unequivocal: both in the case of the Manila conference in May and another in Bangkok in July, it was reported to have put strong pressures on the respective governments of those two countries to stifle the conferences by not allowing international speakers into the country to participate. In the former case this resulted in Irish Nobel Peace Prize winner Mairead Maguire being denied entry in the Philippines and being sent back to Europe, Bishop Soma of Japan was allowed in only after the intervention of Archbishop Sin of Manila and the name of Madame Mitterrand of France was also included on the blacklist of those who would not be permitted entry. In fact, both events went ahead as planned, despite some Timorese and international speakers being sent back, and the attempt to prevent the meetings taking place generated considerable adverse criticism in the international press as for example:

Indeed Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, normally a staunch supporter of the Suharto regime was said to be "disappointed" by moves to stifle the conferences. (18)

Dialogue and confidence-building measures

Historic encounters

As a result of the UN-mediated talks between Portugal and Indonesia in May, two historic meetings later took place. Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas met officially for the first time representatives of the East Timorese resistance movement (Jose Ramos-Horta of the CNRM, Joao Carrascalao of the UDT and Jose Luis Guterres of FRETILIN). The three Timorese are reported to have stressed at the meeting that they were only representatives and that the leader of the resistance movement was Xanana Gusmao whom they consulted and for whose release from prison they appealed. (19)
In the same week, Portuguese Foreign Minister had an official meeting with Francisco Lopes da Cruz, Indonesian ambassador on Timorese affairs.

"Reconciliation a weak philosophy"

A week earlier the second round of the "Reconciliation" meetings of "leaders of East Timorese society living abroad and from East Timor" had taken place in England between dismissed Fretilin leader Abilio Araujo and pro-integration Timorese led by Lopes da Cruz. A UN observer, Mr Tamrat Samuel, was also present at the meeting. Jose Ramos Horta and the other resistance representatives came out strongly against these meetings.

Both Bishop Belo and Xanana Gusmao also rejected the "reconciliation" meetings. In a prison encounter with two of the participants, Mr Gusmao commented on the notion of reconciliation between Timorese: "I think the philosophy is an extremely weak one. Reconciliation with whom? The problem is not one of reconciliation between Timorese ..." and he described the process of reconciliation meetings as "merely a political ploy". (20)
Bishop Belo in a letter to Abilio Araujo said that he would only be willing to participate in talks where "all the political and social sectors of the Timorese people, ... [including] FRETILIN, the CNRM, UDT, the traditional leaders, students and those at university" were involved. He went on to ask "Why are Timorese on the outside in favour of reconciliation, when back here the people are still being subjected to all kinds of pressure; when Dili is gradually becoming a Javanese city; when waves of immigrants continue to arrive and occupy the fertile lands of the southern coast; when the young people involved in the 12 November [Santa Cruz massacre in 1991] are still being hunted down?" (21)

Indeed one of the participants, MP Salvador Ximenes, said he was in favour of the meeting being open to all Timorese sectors, including Bishop Belo and the representatives of the resistance movement. (22)

Suharto should do a de Klerk!

Referring to a mooted encounter between President Suharto and Abilio Araujo, Dr George Aditjondro commented that there would be no point in such a dialogue. "I think the only person the President should meet is Xanana Gusmao (...). I would like to call on the President to follow the magnanimous example of de Klerk in South Africa by freeing Xanana Gusmao who is recognized internationally as the leader of the East Timor movement." (23)

Xanana for immediate referendum

Xanana Gusmao is now said to be serving his 20-year prison sentence with relatively good living conditions, having his own cell in Cipinang prison, in marked contrast to his early days in the prison when he was subjected to routine harassment by other inmates, allegedly at the instigation of the prison authorities. He is reported to have refused offers of exile.
The imprisoned Timorese leader, who was awarded the Human Rights Award of the United Nations Association of Australia in November, has insisted in interviews and in various letters he has sent out that he sees UN mediation as the only way to resolve the question in the long term and that "I believe the best solution is for there to be an immediate referendum ... but knowing the limited conditions in which the Timor question is being negotiated, I would say that the peace plan of our resistance council, the CNRM, is the instrument which offers all guarantees to Indonesia for a solution acceptable to the international community." (24)

Bishop Belo, Nobel Peace Prize nominee, also put his weight behind the need for a referendum saying in a document issued by the Catholic Church in East Timor on July 31 "In this situation the Church's suggestion is to hold a REFERENDUM".
The Bishop has continued to speak out and let the outside world know about the everyday difficulties facing his flock: "It's like war here ... and I try to be the voice of the voiceless." (25)

After a sacrilege incident involving Indonesian soldiers and another incident at Dili University involving insults to two nuns, had lead to peaceful protests involving 500 students which resulted in 16 injured youths, detentions and disappearances, he was moved to say: "Timor is like hell. Christians are constantly being arrested, beaten and intimidated by police". (25)

In October he denounced a program of forced sterilisation which was being systematically applied to Timorese women and had caused conflicts "not only in the capital but also in several other towns such as Viqueque and Suai". (25)

"An inspirational figure"

Irish Nobel Peace Prize winner, Mairead Maguire, in her letter to the Nobel Committee, nominating the Bishop for the prize on November 11, compared him to Luther King and Ghandi as "an inspirational figure who has spoken out courageously for truth and justice in spite of death threats". (26)

END NOTES

(1) Jakarta Post Oct 15
(2) Reuter Nov 16
(3) The Australian Nov 24
(4) VOA Nov 21
(5) BBC Nov. 13
(6) AP 21 Nov
(7) Reuter 1 Dec.
(8) UPI Oct 14
(9) John Pilger, New Statesman and Society, Nov 25.
(10) Reuter 8 Dec
(11) Jawa Pos 1 Dec
(12) Reuter Nov.13
(13) Kompas 14 Oct.
(14) AFP 15 June
(15) Shakai Shimpo Sep. 6; AFP Aug. 11; Reuter Nov. 14
(16) Indonesian Observer Sep 22; Guardian Nov. 4, 21, 23, 25
(17) Tapol Report 25 Oct; Tapol Report 23 Dec.
(18) Le Monde June 1; Matebian News, E-mail, reg. easttimor July 26
(19) IPS Oct 7.
(20) Publico June 9
(21) Publico May 12
(22) Kompas Nov. 5
(23) Sinar Nov. 19
(24) Jolliffe interview, Eastern Express Aug. 31
(25) Reuter July 20; South China Morning Post July 18; AFP Oct. 19
(26) Peace People News Release 11 Nov; Two planned ambush attempts were reported by a Polish journalist in Jornal de Noticias April 2.

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APPENDIX

Press cuttings

The Boston Globe

WEDNESDAY, MAY 11, 1994

Ending the agony of East Timor

Introducing a "Nightline" program on the slaughter in Rwanda, Ted Koppel invoked as an example of horrors unremarked in the media the Indonesian genocide in East Timor. Koppel's passing reference to the agony of East Timor was noteworthy not merely because it was exceptional, but also because Indonesia's crimes against humanity on the island were committed with the complicity of US governments, and often with US weapons.

Indonesian forces first invaded East Timor, then part of the crumbling Portuguese empire, in December 1975, hours after President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger ended a state visit to Jakarta. Human rights organizations, scholars and diplomats estimate that nearly a third of the island's population perished in the ensuing war of conquest conducted by Indonesia.

The horror visited upon the people of East Timor remains a challenge to the United Nations and to US policy makers, since Indonesian troops still occupy East Timor and still torture Timorese suspected of resisting Jakarta's annexation.

In November 1991 the world caught a glimpse of Indonesia's murderous colonial methods when a British cameraman filmed Indonesian soldiers massacring mourners at a funeral.

Last year, in a welcome alteration of US policy, President Clinton gave US backing to a resolution of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva calling for an end to Indonesia's abuse of human rights in East Timor. Last Friday the foreign ministers of Indonesia and Portugal met in Geneva, under UN auspices, to discuss the issue of East Timor. The result was a dilatory communique saying there will be no further discussion before January 1995.

The Geneva talks should become a forum to prepare the way for an internationally monitored referendum that allows the people of East Timor to determine their political future. Lesser measures will not end the agony of the Timorese.

Clinton can fulfill a moral obligation incurred by his predecessors if he notifies UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali of strong US support for a referendum on self-determination for East Timor.

The New York Times

EDITORIALS

TUESDAY, MAY 24, 1994

Timorous on Timor

It is generally reckoned that at least 200,000 civilians died after Indonesia lawlessly invaded in 1975 and then annexed the former Portuguese colony of East Timor. But unlike recent massacres in Rwanda, it caused no international outcry, no calls for military intervention by the United Nations. One reason for the different response is that Indonesia is a big and powerful Islamic country, a leader of the nonaligned bloc, yet also a lucrative market for Europe and the United States. And Jakarta has few scruples about using its muscle.

This has been confirmed afresh by Indonesia's crude pressure on President Fidel Ramos of the Philippines to censor a human rights conference in Manila scheduled to begin next Tuesday, at which eight exiled East Timorese activists were invited to speak. When Indonesia's military regime learned of this, it warned that unless the conference was canceled, Indonesia would probably refuse to be host to peace talks between the Philippine Government and Muslim separatist rebels.

Initially President Ramos tried to mollify Indonesia, sending an envoy to Jakarta and stressing that Manila recognized East Timor as part of Indonesia, adding that his Government was powerless to halt a private conference. The rumbling only increased in Jakarta, so Mr. Ramos on Friday banned non-Filipinos from taking part in the conference, saying their presence would be "inimical to the national interest." Now Jakarta has pulled out of a Filipino trade fair, which has been postponed. Thus does Indonesia assert its right to silence debate on East Timor anywhere.

Will Australia be the next target? In years past, Australian journalists have defied travel restrictions to East Timor. But like the Philippines, Australia meekly refuses to challenge Indonesia's illegal grab of this unfortunate former colony. Indeed, in the tradition of Orwell's Newspeak, Australian diplomats avoid mentioning the words "East Timor" and pointedly talk about "Timor," thus uniting in their vocabulary what Indonesia has vainly striven to unite with gun and bomb. The sound of those dropping knees surely has not escaped the Suharto regime, and Canberra may soon be pressured to carry self-censorship even further.

LA CROIX L'ÉVÉNEMENT

DIMANCHE 29, LUNDI 30 MAI 1994

« Laissons les Timorais s'exprimer »

INTERVIEW

Mgr Carlos Belo

Évêque de Dili

Evêque de Dili, l'unique diocèse de Timor-Oriental, Mgr Carlos Felipe Jiménez Belo assume la lourde charge d'être, sur le territoire, à la fois le premier représentant de l'Eglise catholique locale et le porte-parole *de facto* d'une population bâillonnée par la sécurité de Djakarta. Formé au Portugal et directement rattaché au Saint-Siège depuis l'annexion de Timor en 1976 – il assiste en tant qu'observateur aux débats de la conférence épiscopale indonésienne – le prélat dresse pour *LA CROIX l'Événement* , d'un ton calme mais déterminé, le bilan de presque vingt années d'occupation indonésienne...

– Les ministres des affaires étrangères indonésiens et portugais se sont à nouveau rencontrés à Genève au début de ce mois pour parler de Timor. Quelles sont les chances de succès d'une telle négociation?

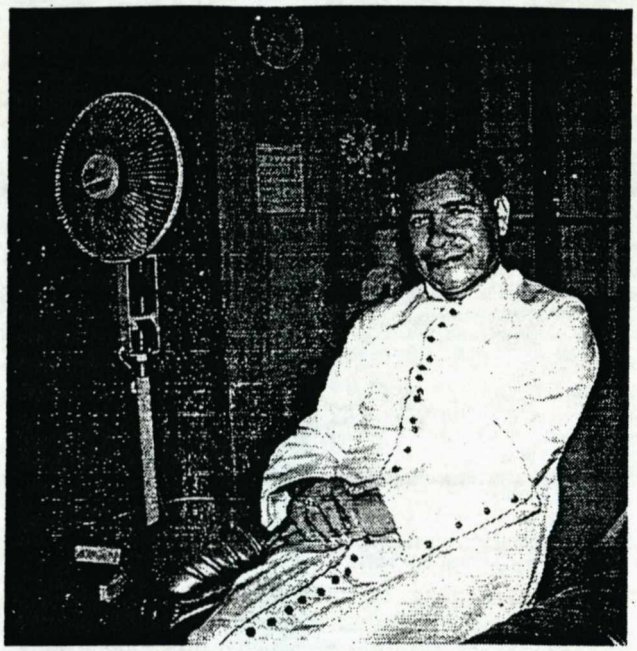
Mgr Belo : Il faut, à mon avis, différencier deux choses : le contentieux diplomatique entre Djakarta, Lisbonne et les Nations Unies (1), et le drame humain que vit la population de Timor dont les droits sont bafoués. Sur le plan diplomatique bien sûr. des arrangements finiront sans doute par être trouvés. Mais sur le plan humain, rien ne sera réglé tant que les Timorais ne pourront pas s'exprimer librement sur leur avenir. Laissons les Timorais s'exprimer et nous verrons après...

– Est-ce que ce référendum est réaliste?

– Rien n'est plus réaliste : regardez vous-même, interrogez les gens et vous verrez que nous sommes différents des Indonésiens... Notre histoire et notre culture ne sont pas les mêmes. Alors oui, le réalisme impose de donner la parole au peuple de cette île. Est-ce, en revanche, réalisable? Est-ce acceptable par le gouvernement de Djakarta? Là résident les vraies questions. Cela sera difficile, très difficile bien sûr. Mais c'est la seule manière de régler à terme le problème de Timor.

– Quel est votre rôle dans ce contexte?

– Certains, du côté indonésien, me voient comme une espèce d'irréductible opposant mais ils ont tort. Je ne suis qu'un témoin engagé car il est impossible de faire autrement. Il est inacceptable que les Timorais, premiers propriétaires de cette terre, soient progressivement relégués au rang de citoyens de deuxième classe. Inacceptable que l'armée et la police indonésienne continuent d'effectuer des rafles ou d'arrêter arbitrairement. Dénoncer l'injustice fait aussi partie de mon devoir d'évêque.



Mgr Carlos Bela est devenu *de facto*, le porte-parole d'une population bâillonnée. *(Photo R. Werly.)*

« Rien ne bougera vraiment tant que les militaires contrôleront l'Indonésie »

– Justement, n'avez-vous pas l'impression d'être parfois lâché ou trop peu soutenu par l'extérieur?

– Timor est loin, et sans doute trop petit pour susciter une solidarité sans faille. C'est vrai qu'il m'arrive d'être déçu, furieux même de voir que notre drame est ainsi oublié. Même les plus hautes autorités de l'Eglise donnent parfois l'impression de chercher davantage à ménager les catholiques indonésiens qu'à donner de l'écho à nos revendications. Je ne parle pas du soutien moral, spirituel pastoral, qui lui, est réel. Je parle du soutien actif, c'est-à-dire politique. Compte tenu de l'importance de l'Indonésie à tous égards, Timor-Est reste un sujet tabou...

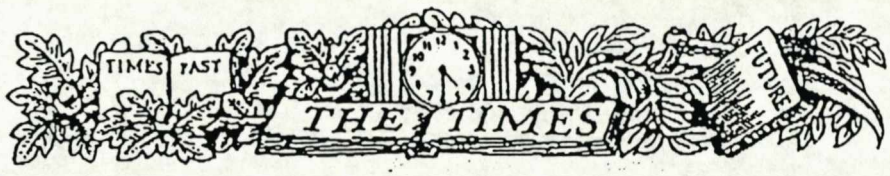
– Une amélioration réelle de la situation sur le territoire est-elle possible en l'absence de solution politique globale?

– Tout irait déjà mieux si l'armée indonésienne rentrait dans ses casernes et cessait d'administrer Timor-Est à la pointe des fusils. La seule présence des soldats attise les tensions et fait régner dans l'île un climat général de peur. La politique de « transmigration » qui permet à des milliers d'Indonésiens de s'installer ici doit aussi être stoppée, afin que les emplois créés aillent en priorité aux Timorais. L'intégration à l'Indonésie restera lettre morte dans le cœur du peuple tant que le gouvernement de Djakarta nous traitera comme une province conquise. Mais cela demande trop de changements au sommet de l'État : à mon sens, rien ne bougera vraiment tant que les militaires continueront de contrôler l'Indonésie.

Recueilli par
Richard WERLY
(À Dili)

(1) Bien que Timor-Oriental ait proclamé son indépendance en 1975, l'ONU, qui n'a jamais reconnu l'annexion indonésienne, continue de considérer ce territoire comme étant sous la tutelle du Portugal.

THE TIMES, WEDNESDAY JUNE 1, 1994



A REGIONAL BULLY

Manila caves in to Jakarta over occupied East Timor

As a result of pressure from Jakarta, and capitulation by President Ramos in Manila, a private conference on occupied East Timor, organised at the University of the Philippines, has leapt to unexpected prominence. In a sequence of events which reap shame for the governments of both countries, Indonesia and the Philippines have given the world a tutorial in "Asian values".

The unsavoury story runs as follows. A clutch of human rights organisations wished to conduct a conference in Manila on occupied East Timor. There should be nothing in this to startle the observer: since the Indonesian army invaded that ill-starred territory in December 1975, it has murdered over a third of the population.

Its violation of international law was comparable with Saddam Hussein's annexation of Kuwait and General Galtieri's misadventure in the Falklands. Yet, without paying even the smallest price, Jakarta has ignored numerous resolutions of the UN Security Council calling for the withdrawal of Indonesian troops and upholding the right to self-determination of the Roman Catholic Timorese.

In its domestic affairs, the Indonesian regime is not accustomed to making a distinction between the public and private domains. Employing the same methods in its dealings with a sovereign neighbour, it ordered Mr Ramos to "cancel" the conference. When the Filipino President pleaded that he was powerless to do so, Indonesia flexed its muscles. It threatened to cease its mediation between the government of Mr Ramos and the Muslim-separatist Moro National Liberation Front; what is more, it rumbled darkly of the "consequences" for the Philippines of a collapse in peace talks.

That was not all. Indonesia broke its promise to attend a trade fair in Davao, causing a cancellation of the event; and it has impounded a number of Filipino fishing vessels whose activities in Indonesian waters it had previously tolerated. Mr Ramos then gave in to Jakarta's bullying. He issued a presidential decree banning all foreign nationals from attending the conference. Mairead Maguire, a Nobel peace laureate, was turned back at Manila airport; Danielle Mitterrand, the wife of the French President, was "blacklisted". Juan Ramos-Horta, a Timorese resistance leader based in Australia, was unable to attend and deliver the keynote address.

The action of the Philippines President in kowtowing to Indonesia deserves international notice. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Jaime Sin, set the right note when he apologised, "as a Filipino citizen", for the failure of his government "to spearhead the growth of freedom and human dignity" in the region, castigating it, too, for "giving in to the pressure of a foreign nation".

Filipinos fought to overthrow the regime of Ferdinand Marcos in order to replace it with a government guided by democratic principles. The only positive aspect of this episode is that it should earn vigorous opprobrium for Indonesia. International attention will return once more to the plight of those who live — and die — in that country's wretched "twenty-seventh province", occupied East Timor.

The New York Times

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 1994

Indonesia's Embarrassment

Indonesia is the world's fourth most populous country. It is a diverse society, rich in both culture and natural resources and eager to take a respected place in the community of nations. So it is appropriate that the Indonesian city of Bogor is hosting the informal summit of the newly formed Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation alliance.

However, Indonesia's image has been marred by the perennially embarrassing issue of East Timor, the former Portuguese colony it invaded in 1975 and forcibly annexed. Anticipating world attention on the summit, 29 East Timorese students entered the U.S. Embassy grounds in Jakarta on Saturday and have refused to move. Rioting in Dili, the capital of East Timor, broke out over the weekend after the alleged killing of an East Timorese merchant by Indonesian soldiers.

By some estimates, 200,000 people died in the 1975 invasion, roughly a third of East Timor's population. Since then the Indonesian Government has maintained a huge military presence, encouraged migration of new residents from Java to swamp the native population, punished peaceful dissent and restricted access by outsiders.

In bilateral talks after the summit, Mr. Clinton is expected to raise the issue of East Timor with President Suharto of Indonesia. It is not the only human rights issue he should raise. Equally important are repression of the trade union movement and oppressive policies elsewhere, notably Irian Jaya, Aceh and North Sumatra. Muchtar Pakpahan, chairman of the Independent All Indonesian Labor Federation, was sentenced to three years in jail on flimsy subversion charges last week.

Given Indonesia's authoritarian tradition and its aspirations for world respect, Mr. Clinton can make some reasonable demands in his meeting with President Suharto. The first priority should be to insure the safety of the students inside the embassy compound and other students still at risk.

He can ask that Jakarta drastically scale down its military presence in East Timor. He can push for more local control and unrestricted access by journalists and both international and domestic human rights organizations, and an end to human rights violations such as arbitrary detention and torture, forced birth control measures and violent repression of peaceful dissent.

A final and helpful gesture would be to make contact with Dili's Roman Catholic Bishop, Filipe Belo, who has spoken out courageously in defense of the Timorese people at considerable personal risk.

Indonesia is not a monolith. The recent meeting between Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Ali Alatas, and the East Timorese opposition leader Jose Ramos-Horta is cause for hope. All these issues are the subject of intense debate within the country, and many Indonesians understand the danger they pose to its international standing. President Suharto must be encouraged to listen to those voices.

EASTERN FIST

Indonesia cannot afford an occupied East Timor

Two occupations have this week stolen the attention which President Suharto of Indonesia had reserved for the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) forum. The first, an act of despair, is the occupation of the grounds of the American Embassy in Jakarta, by 29 Timorese students; the second, an occupation as old as some of the protesting students are, is of East Timor itself, shackled to Indonesia since 1976 as that country's "twenty-seventh province".

Given the guest-list at the Apec forum, it was unlikely that human rights in occupied East Timor -- or in Indonesia, for that matter — would be accorded a prominent place on the agenda. But, although the politics of trade prevailed in the end over the politics of rights, "firm and forceful" criticism has come from the one quarter that should matter most to General Suharto, the administration in Washington.

Recent riots by students in Dili, the capital of occupied East Timor, suggest that the Timorese remain as alienated from Indonesia as they ever were. General Suharto has sought to convince his critics abroad that his administration has now adopted a more emollient approach to the Timor question. He has pointed repeatedly to the fact that Ali Alatas, his foreign minister, renowned for describing the "twenty-seventh province" as "like a sharp piece of gravel in our shoes", had talks in New York earlier this year with José Ramos Horta, the exiled Timorese leader. What he has failed to point out is that Mr Alatas refused firmly to discuss the status of the territory with Mr Ramos Horta.

General Suharto has said, also, that he would consider "very soon" the grant of autonomy or special status to the Timorese. He has failed to point out that what is meant by autonomy in the lexicon of his administration bears no relation to the concept as understood in a democratic society. Senior spokesmen for his government have stressed that "the autonomy in East Timor has to be the same as the autonomy in other provinces".

The Timorese are not impressed by these empty palliatives. Nor should others be. In the 18 years of their vassalage to Jakarta, over 200,000 have been murdered by the Indonesian armed forces. The Timorese have witnessed, also, the illegal colonisation of their lands by some 100,000 Javanese, the imposition of an alien language and systematic assaults on their culture and religion. Yet while its methods are harshest in occupied East Timor, General Suharto's government has abused its powers in the 26 other provinces of the unwieldy archipelago: newspapers are banned arbitrarily, union members are imprisoned and counter-insurgency campaigns in Aceh and Irian Jaya have led to a disconcerting pattern of human rights violations.

It is the Timorese, however, who command immediate attention. Their subjugation only serves Jakarta ill. The cost to General Suharto of holding Dili is more than merely financial: it is, most tellingly, a drain on the dwindling fund of good will which the General has with his democratic allies in the western world. Indonesia cannot afford to persevere with an occupation which saps it politically, retards its modernity and offers nothing but opprobrium in return.